

**FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD**  
*Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3a. 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12*  
**JESUS, GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD**

Christmas Day, Epiphany of the Lord, and Baptism of the Lord are a trilogy of celebrations referred to as the "Manifestation Feasts." They commemorate the manifestation or revelation of God to the world in human form (Incarnation) in the person of His Son Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14). Jesus comes into the world as the presence of God. He has the extraordinary mission to draw all people to Himself and lead them to God the Father, the source of all creation. Jesus is therefore the Light of the world, the Savior (Jn 1:4-5, 9). The Feast of Epiphany is mainly observed in Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican Churches. It is celebrated on January 6 or the Sunday that falls between January 2 and January 8.

In Western Christianity, the Feast of Epiphany is the day on which the infant Jesus was shown to the Three Wise Men or the Magi or the Three Astrologers. According to medieval legend the names of the wise men were Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. In this regard, Epiphany is also known as "Three Kings Day." These dignitaries are called wise men because they used their knowledge and mystical experience to discover a Star which signified that something extraordinary had happened that would have a profound influence on humankind. Interestingly, while the Jews were expecting a Messiah, these non-Jews were also anticipating some signs of divine involvement in the events of the world. God was showing the Messiah to the Magi who represented the Gentile world.

It is suggested that Matthew might have used stories familiar to the oldest monotheistic Zoroastrian religion which originated in Persia in the 1500s B.C. Thus, the Magi could be Zoroastrian priests who looked for the Child Jesus and presented gifts to Him to indicate that they also recognized Jesus as the true Messiah for all peoples. Furthermore, according to St. Chrysostom, the meeting between the Magi and King Herod and his court was also a manifestation of Jesus to the Jewish people although they did not recognize that the Messiah was physically present at the time.

In the Eastern Church where the feast originated, Epiphany is known as "Theophany" from the Greek word meaning "shining forth" or "divine manifestation." The Eastern Churches consider the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan as the manifestation of Jesus to the world as God's own Son (Lk 3:22). In other cultural and faith traditions the feast is linked to Jesus' first miracle at Cana when He turned water into wine signifying the manifestation of His divinity to the world (Jn 2:11). In all the traditions linked to the Epiphany, the essence of the feast remains the same. It is the mystery of the "Incarnation" or the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the world whether at His birth as infant or as adult during His baptism or in any of His miracles.

As presented by the Evangelists, Epiphany emphasizes the historical Jesus as "God-on-earth." Jesus has entered the world not for Himself but for the benefit of all who are in the world. Jesus gives meaning to each life and His presence and love exude comfort (Phil 2:1). He shows the world that the ultimate meaning of human life is relational: to seek the well-being of others, to love people, and bring joy to them (Matt 5:7, 9). Furthermore, we learn that Jesus "reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with His powerful Word" (Heb 1:3).

The Magi's journey following the Star mirrors our own journey in life in search of truth, inner peace, and comfort beyond science and economic prosperity. Jesus is the Star leading us on our journey.

Christianity calls us to move beyond what we can examine with our senses, or verify scientifically as truths. The Star shining over the world from Bethlehem is one that enables us to realize a greater and deeper understanding of how the sacred is so vital to the meaning of life. Like the Magi, we need to let our mystical dreams and life experiences bring us to God through Jesus who is "God-on-Earth."

We lose our focus on the Star when we allow our human imperfections of greed, pride, and selfishness to distract us from walking in the footsteps of Jesus. However, anytime we detach ourselves from these short-comings, the Star will reappear and direct our lives again.

The Feast of Epiphany therefore reminds us of our faith in God who has revealed Himself in His Son. God takes us back to Jesus and His. Our trust in these faith-filled values will take us beyond what we see in the world to discover God.

How would you keep the "Star" that the three Wise Men followed in your sight this New Year?

When your human faults and frailties lead you astray, what can you do to get back to the path of Jesus illumined by the Star?

In the year ahead, how would you use the Eucharist, Penance, and good deeds to keep you on your journey to follow Jesus?

The Peace of the Risen Christ be with You.